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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3421  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3285  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3949  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3930

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001215

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [TX](#) [UP](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: VISIT OF UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT SEEN AS  
A POSITIVE STEP

REF: ASHGABAT 1189

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia Reed Curran. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: President Yushchenko's visit to Turkmenistan provided a forum for signing high level agreements and resolving some outstanding working-level problems between Ukraine and Turkmenistan. Yushchenko attended opening ceremonies for a Ukrainian-built railway bridge and a statue of a Ukrainian poet. Despite the pomp and circumstance, President Berdimuhamedov might be more interested in counterbalancing Russian influence than in truly revitalizing Turkmen-Ukrainian relations. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) A contact at the Ukrainian Embassy, Anna Dobracheva, gave Poloff a readout of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko's trip to Turkmenistan September 14-16. This was the first presidential trip between Turkmenistan and Ukraine since Yushchenko attended Berdimuhamedov's inauguration in January 2007. Yushchenko was accompanied by a 15-member delegation, including the ministers of foreign affairs, defense, culture, and agriculture. In addition to meetings and official events in Ashgabat, Berdimuhamedov and Yushchenko also traveled to Lebap Province to open a recently completed railway bridge built by a Ukrainian company and to break ground for construction of an road bridge. In Ashgabat, Yushchenko participated in a ceremony in central Ashgabat to celebrate the renovation and re-opening of a monument to the Ukrainian poet Shevchenko.

13. (C) Dobracheva said that five agreements were signed while Yushchenko was in Turkmenistan, including a joint statement by the two presidents, an agreement between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, an agreement between the two countries' Chambers of Commerce, and agreement between the Ministries of Agriculture, and an agreement between transportation institutes. Although all of these agreements were general in nature, Dobracheva was hopeful that they would be the foundation for improved cooperation between the two countries and that the details on implementing the agreements would be "easily worked out." Yushchenko invited the Turkmen President to Ukraine in December, and Berdimuhamedov accepted.

¶4. (C) According to Dobracheva, the ministers traveling with Yushchenko had meetings with counterparts, and, as a result, several outstanding, albeit relatively minor, issues had been resolved. The Ukrainians and Turkmen finally reached an agreement on a bilateral cultural exchange. 2010 will be the year of Ukraine in Turkmenistan, and 2011 will be the year of Turkmenistan in Ukraine. In 2010, the Ukrainians hope to show Ukrainian movies and bring some Ukrainian opera to Turkmenistan, but are constrained from doing anything elaborate because of budget shortages.

¶5. (C) The Ukrainians also made headway on getting permission for their national airline to fly to Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan Airlines currently flies to Kyiv, but no Ukrainian airlines fly directly to Ashgabat. The Turkmen acquiescence, however, came with the condition that the Ukrainian flights would have to stop first at Turkmenbashi and then continue to Ashgabat. Dobracheva assumed that this was part of their plan to build tourism at the Avaza tourist zone on the Caspian Sea.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Dobracheva was overall very upbeat about the trip, portraying it as a new start for Turkmen-Ukrainian relations. However, there were few concrete plans established, and Ukraine did not get a definite offer from Turkmenistan to sell them gas (reftel). It remains to be seen if Turkmen-Ukrainian relations have turned a corner, or if Berdimuhamedov is making a show of strengthening relations with Ukraine in order to counterbalance Russia's influence.

END COMMENT.

CURRAN